

voice heard, to be able to have a say in the direction of our democracy or whether we are going to have a democracy at all, whether we are going to accept the world where politicians, like the people in this body but at the State legislatures, can overturn the independent judgment of other parts of the election apparatus, people that held the line this year when somebody in the White House was trying to intimidate them to change their mind.

We have got people in this country, State legislators, who are passing laws that would allow them to do exactly what Donald Trump said he wanted them to do, which was overturn the election judgments of independently elected or appointed officials. That is something we cannot allow to have happen because the minute that does happen, you lose the democracy. The minute you cannot make a decision at the voting booth, at the voting box, at the poll, the minute you can no longer make a decision there that is held up no matter who wins and no matter who loses, that has the confidence of the American people, that is when you lose the democracy because the whole point of a democracy, the way we make decisions, is a peaceful transfer of power.

And in the absence of that very, very unusual aspect of our society compared to other societies around the world and the history of humanity, in the absence of that, what you confront is political violence like the violence that we saw on January 6, where people tried to take by force something that should have been decided and was decided at the ballot box.

And all of this, in my view, is why it is so important for us to pass the Freedom to Vote Act. The bill includes commonsense reforms that are broadly supported by the American people, and that is because they reflect common sense, just like the American people.

And we know these reforms work, Mr. President, because we have already passed them in Colorado, thanks in large part to your leadership. We banned partisan gerrymandering. We don't have it in our State.

So, again, politicians in Colorado don't have the right to choose who their voters are; voters get to choose who their elected leaders are.

We have automatic voter registration, as this bill has; early voting, so people have a chance to get off work and go to vote and don't have to just be there on election day.

Vote by mail, which I have to say, up until the last President's Presidency, there was no one in America that was concerned about vote by mail. We had cast millions of ballots in this country without a shred of fraud. Just ask the American Enterprise Institute. They are the ones that said you are more likely to get struck by lightning than participate in voter fraud by voting by mail. That is not a Democratic-leaning organization, as everybody on this floor knows.

Secure drop boxes in your neighborhood, where it takes 30 seconds to

vote—every time I go there, next to the Botanic Gardens in my neighborhood in Denver, and I drop my ballot off, I think about all the people all over this country in 2021 who don't have the simple ability to drop their ballot off in a ballot box, who are having to wait in line for hours for the privilege to vote just because of the State they live in.

We should have basic national standards for people. It is a civil rights issue. It is an issue that is fundamental to our democracy. And having a convenient ballot box is one of those things. Having mail-in ballots is one of those things. We have had zero fraud in our system.

And as I said earlier, in many ways, it is as important to rural Colorado as any other part of our State because the people live a long way from the ballot box.

If our State's history is any guide at all, we can do this in a bipartisan way. And it is not surprising to me that vast majorities of Americans, whether they are Republicans or Independents or Democrats, support the provisions that are in this bill by wide, wide margins.

I am going to be pleased to go back to Colorado and have the chance to tell them that we have banned dark money from our political system; that the Supreme Court's fundamental misunderstanding in *Citizens United*, where they completely misdefined the problem and failed to see the corruption of inaction that happens around here, the things that aren't done because of the dark money that is spent in our elections because—fear that some billionaire is going to show up and throw what to them is nothing into a race that could determine the outcome of our elections.

We have got to change that, and the only way we can do that is by passing this bill. And I think that if we pass this bill, what we find is that States all over this country would see 76 percent of the people voting, just like in Colorado, instead of 50 percent of the people voting or 40 percent of the people voting. That would have a huge impact on what we are doing. We could show the world that we can actually compete with the communist government in China. We can resolve the question about whether democracy is up to this in the 21st century or not.

We could invest in the next generation of Americans. We could improve our schools, improve our roads and bridges, and invest in the future again, as so many generations of Americans have done in the past when they stood up for democracy and the next generation of Americans. That is the question that we are confronted with today as we take this vote.

Are we going to stand up for our democracy? Are we going to stand up for humanity, who is relying on us to deliver a democracy that works? And are we going to stand up for the next generation of Americans and remain a beacon to the rest of the world, committed to our highest ideals and not our worst instincts?

I think we have the chance today when we take this vote to follow generations of Americans who have, in their lives, lived out those best ideals, rather than caving into our worst instincts.

It seems to me—putting Democrats and Republicans aside—the question in front of us is: Are you for democracy or not? Are you for the freedom to vote or not? Are you for maximizing fraud-free elections, where people can actually turn out to vote no matter where they live? Or are you suppressing the vote of our fellow countrymen and women?

That is the question before us. And because it is such a clear question, I would urge every one of my colleagues, Republican or Democrat, to vote for this legislation so we can set a basic standard for what the freedom of vote should look like in the United States of America.

With that, Mr. President, I appreciate your indulgence and patience.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—our Nation was founded upon this set of inalienable rights that are provided to each one of us not by government, but by our Divine Creator who made us all equal. It is the role of the government to secure these blessings.

Regardless of our differences and disagreements, these principles outlined in our founding documents have always united us and made America exceptional. They are the framework of the American dream, the promise that through self-determination, hard work, and opportunity, we can all achieve a better life for ourselves and for our families.

Yet, whether you are pursuing a career, attending school, starting a business, or shopping for a dream home, DC politicians and government bureaucrats are increasingly dictating when you may exercise your rights and how you can live your life, and then spying on you to make sure that you are following the rules. This “Washington knows best” approach is negatively impacting nearly every aspect of your life, and you may not realize it.

To demonstrate the point, let's walk through a few common scenarios and the real-life consequences you could face as a result of the Biden administration's policies. For each, ask yourself: In this situation, is the government acting to secure or subvert your rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?

You work hard and probably put some of your earnings away in a savings account to pay your monthly bills

or to be prepared for an unexpected emergency. And, folks, that is just a smart thing to do.

Well, if you deposit or withdraw more than \$10,000 over the course of a year, the Biden administration wants the IRS to be able to spy on you. To put this number into perspective, if you were renting an apartment in Iowa, the average annual cost to do so is just over \$10,000 per year. That is the threshold, folks.

Why does Washington even need to know this information about you?

The Treasury Department says this is necessary to make sure “the top one percent . . . can’t evade” paying taxes.

You heard that right. The Biden administration thinks you are rich if, over the course of an entire year, you either save or spend \$10,000. They might even have the IRS audit you for tax evasion.

Treating American citizens like criminal suspects for the innocent act of using a bank account is, quite frankly, un-American.

The Biden administration has been up front about its motive here. Washington Democrats are looking to collect as many tax dollars as possible to finance their never-ending reckless spending spree. And as a direct result of these budget busting bills, government inflation is driving up prices and limiting availability of everyday essentials.

Let’s take a look at life in Joe Biden’s America. The cost of food, the cost of rent, the cost of nearly everything just keeps going up and up. Meanwhile, the size of many products is shrinking, which means you have to work harder, pay more, and get a heck of a lot less. It is even costing more just to get to the grocery store. Gas is now more than \$3 a gallon, the highest price in 6 years. And this really shouldn’t come as a surprise.

Remember, on his first day on the job, President Biden signed an Executive order to end the Keystone XL Pipeline, killing thousands of jobs and limiting our access to oil and gas supplies. And while costs keep going up, just finding what you need or want has become yet another ordeal.

As a result of Biden bucks, which paid people not to work for most of the year, many products are in short supply or unavailable altogether. Shipping companies are even facing equipment shortages and, of course, they remain understaffed.

And, folks, this crisis isn’t ending anytime soon. The upcoming holiday season is already being referred to as “Biden’s Blue Christmas.” The White House is even warning there will be items people can’t get for Christmas. So let’s just hope for the sake of the kids who have been good all year that Biden’s broken supply chain problems don’t extend all the way to the North Pole.

And speaking of kids, let’s take a look at what might happen to parents who take a vocal role in their chil-

dren’s education. It is a good thing for parents to be active in their children’s education, and it comes as no surprise that they can often get very passionate about the subject.

So imagine going to a school board meeting and exercising your right to express your concerns about a new policy or proposed curriculum at your child’s school, but instead of having your issue addressed, you find yourself labeled as a domestic terrorist.

Yeah, folks, you heard that right—a domestic terrorist under investigation by our Nation’s chief law enforcement agency.

It sounds insane, right?

But it is a crazy reality today. President Biden’s Attorney General is mobilizing the FBI against parents who make their voices heard at school board meetings.

Let me be very clear about this. Violence or even threats of violence against school board members, teachers, or any public official should never ever be tolerated; but neither should threats of intimidation by the government to coerce parents to surrender control over their children’s education.

This is happening at the same time the FBI announced the largest spike in homicides ever recorded. I am not talking about this year, folks. I am not talking about last year, 4, 5, 6 years past. We are talking about the largest spike in homicides ever recorded.

With murder and violent crimes increasing, the President’s liberal allies in Congress are threatening to defund the police. That approach certainly is not going to secure life, liberty, or the pursuit of happiness.

Folks, all of these disturbing trends we just talked about are stark reminders that the principles our Nation was founded upon are not guaranteed. Every generation of Americans owes it to the next generation to preserve and strengthen the blessings of liberty we were fortunate enough to inherit.

I’d expect government coercion, State snooping, empty shelves, and out-of-control inflation in nations with socialist regimes, like China, Cuba, and Venezuela. But regardless of who our President may be, we must never ever accept any of these as part of life in America.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 10 minutes on the matter at hand.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

FREEDOM TO VOTE ACT

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I come to the floor to speak in support of what is right before us right now, and that is, proceeding to debate legislation that is critical to our democracy, the Freedom to Vote Act, which I introduced with the members of the voting rights working group assembled by Leader SCHUMER. That would be Senators MANCHIN, MERKLEY, PADILLA,

KING, KAINE, TESTER, and WARNOCK. We all have our names on this bill. We all feel very strongly about this bill. Why? Because the freedom to vote is fundamental to all of our freedoms, and it is currently under attack.

Since the 2020 elections, we have seen a persistent and coordinated assault on the freedom to vote, but it has been under attack for much longer, as States have closed polling locations on a massive scale and purged hundreds of thousands of voters from the rolls.

As foreign adversaries have actually attempted to interfere in our elections, these attacks on our democracy demand a Federal response. When you have one State attacked by a foreign adversary, when they try to get into voter rolls in Illinois or Hawaii, are we going to expect those States to respond on their own? When you have an assault, a coordinated assault, on voting rights, so you have similar bills introduced across the country to limit drop-off boxes; when you have coordinated attacks to limit vote-by-mail; when you have coordinated attacks to limit registration to vote, it demands a Federal response.

What is amazing about our Constitution is that the Founding Fathers anticipated this because right in the Constitution, it says that Congress—this place where we work—can make and alter the laws regarding Federal elections. It is bulletproof. It has been upheld time and time again.

The urgent need for action could not be more serious. With over 400 bills having been introduced in nearly every State to limit the freedom to vote—over 30 of those have been signed into law—with redistricting underway to draw congressional maps that will define our democracy for the next decade—and the first primary for the 2022 elections is in a little over 4 months in Texas—we must act now.

It has been over 9 months since that violent mob of insurrectionists stormed into this Chamber, opened up people’s desks, and sat where the Presiding Officer is sitting right now. They desecrated our Capitol, the temple of our democracy. This was not just an attack on a building. It was an attack on our Republic. It was an attack on public servants, police officers who were serving us that day.

As I said from the inaugural stage just 2 weeks later under that beautiful blue sky at the very place where you could still see the spray paint on the columns, where we stood in front of makeshift windows—where we stood together, leaders of both political parties in both Chambers and from across the Nation—I said: This is the day our democracy picks itself up, brushes itself off, and does what America always does—goes forward as one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

We took back our democracy that day. With this Freedom to Vote Act, which includes provisions that have the support of 78 percent of Americans